

Spatial and temporal trends in late Pleistocene hunting behaviour in Northern Vietnam: Evidence from the Tràng An World Heritage Area

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Abstract

This paper will consider ongoing research by the SUNDASIA project (AHRC, UK) in the limestone karst forests of the Tràng An World Heritage property, Ninh Binh province, Northern Vietnam. Archaeological excavation of cave sites within Tràng An has yielded records dating from the late Pleistocene to the present. The paper will focus on the late Pleistocene zooarchaeological record, which currently dates from c. 24,000 years before present to the Pleistocene/Holocene transition. It will consider taxonomic and taphonomic trends in the exploitation of vertebrates and how these varied as a function of space and time in the World Heritage Area. The zooarchaeological record currently suggests that - over the course of c. 12,000 years - hunting behaviours varied more as a function of space, rather than time. The evidence suggests a consistent, long-term pattern in the exploitation of several mammalian taxa while inter-site variability is suggestive of local-scale variation in the targeting of prey animals, most parsimoniously explained as a function of differing local environmental conditions and habitats. Taphonomic analyses suggest that preservation of animal bones varied more as a function of site formation processes rather than denoting differences in carcass processing. Despite the likely abundance and diversity of mammalian prey, however, exploitation of individual carcasses of a range of taxa appears to have been intense and suggests expedient utilisation of prey animals throughout the late Pleistocene. These findings will be considered in the context of local and regional environmental and zooarchaeological records to examine the wider applications of the evidence from Tràng An in modelling hunting behaviour in late Pleistocene Southeast Asia.